How To Have A “Fruitful” New Year

John 15:1-8 (NKJV)

Well here we are, the 52nd and final Lord's Day of 2013.

Lord willing, this Tuesday night when the clock strikes 12 midnight, 2013 will officially be over and 2014 will officially begin.

As this year draws to a close, how would you evaluate how 2013 went for you?

- Some people evaluate how the year went by checking the bottom line on their financial statement.

- Farmers tend to evaluate whether it was a good year or bad year by the yield per acre.

- Many people evaluate how the year went by how it impacted them personally. (weight lost or weight gained, assets lost or gained, times of sickness or time in the hospital.)

- Many evaluate how the year went by events that occurred in their family. (deaths in the family, births, marriages, graduations, anniversaries, and so on and so forth.)

- Churches tend to evaluate how the year went by the number of decisions made and/or rise or decline in attendance.

How would evaluate your spiritual growth this past year? Did you read your Bible more? Pray more? Give more? Serve more? Were you more or less faithful in your Church attendance? How many people did you witness to? How many times did you invite someone to Church?
Normally this time of year we focus on what we need to do to have “A Happy New Year.” But for our thoughts this morning, let’s focus our thoughts on “How To Have A Fruitful New Year.”

Please turn with me in your Bibles to our scripture text in the Gospel of John, chapter fifteen, and let’s read verses 1-8.

**John 15:1-8 (NKJV)**

1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Jesus spoke these words on the night of His betrayal as He and His disciples walked from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane.

In these verses, Jesus described His disciples as “the branch” on a vine, and Himself as the “True Vine.” Just as the American bald eagle reminds Americans of our country, “the vine” reminded Jesus’ disciples of their nation, Israel.

During the 400 years of silence between the Old and New Testaments “the grapevine” was minted on Jewish coins. And so when Jesus said, “I am the True Vine” He was saying, “I am the very essence of Israel.” “I am the personification of everything Israel was created to be.”
Jesus then tells His disciples that it is His Father's desire that they "bear fruit." Well, how do we bear "spiritual fruit?" As we look more closely at these verses Jesus reveals three things we must do.

Let's consider these three things as "resolutions" you and I should make in order to "Have A Fruitful New Year."

**RESOLUTION #1: Let Us Resolve To REMEMBER Our ROLE**

1. Throughout the New Testament Jesus used a number of analogies to explain our relationship with Him.

   Jesus is **the Good Shepherd**, we are **the sheep**.
   Jesus is **the Master**, we are **His servants**.
   Jesus is **the Lord and King**, we are **His subjects**.

2. And here in our text, JESUS is "The True Vine" and we are "the branches."

   Picture a tree. You have the main trunk of the tree with its roots running deep into the ground. And then you have the branches extending outward from the trunk of the tree. Those branches cannot produce life themselves.........those branches are dependent upon the trunk of the tree to provide life-giving nourishment.
3. The same is true of us “spiritually.” As “branches” you and I are totally dependent upon THE LORD for our spiritual life, our vitality and our fruitfulness. If we become “detached” from Christ, the “True Vine” we make look spiritually healthy for a time, but in a short time we will wither and die spiritually.

**ANALOGY:** A person on kidney dialysis know they need the dialysis in order to live. But after awhile, some people grow tired of this continual cleansing of their blood. They think they are fine and so they stop the dialysis. For a few days some of them actually feel better, but shortly the toxins start building up in their blood and they die unless they get reconnected to the dialysis.

4. It is the same way in our relationship with Jesus Christ. We get tired of reading our Bible and praying every day, so we go a few days without it and think we’re doing fine spiritually. But then in a short time we start realizing we are spiritually weak........and we don’t have the strength to resist temptation.........and the trials and troubles start mounting.....and we are just getting weaker and weaker spiritually.

5. You see, if you and I forget our role........if we forget that Christ is “The True Vine” and we are just “a branch” we will wither and die spiritually. So if you and I are to have “a fruitful New Year in 2014” WE MUST RESOLVE TO REMEMBER OUR ROLE!
RESOLUTION #2: Let Us Resolve To ABIDE In CHRIST

1. It is very interesting to note in these verses that Jesus doesn’t tell His disciples their job is to produce fruit. He tells them their job is to abide in Him.

2. Seven times in verses 4-7 Jesus reminds His disciples of the importance of ABIDING IN HIM.

   To “abide in Christ” means to stay connected or to “stick close.”

   ANALOGY: Think of a time when you took your children or your grandchildren to some public place where there was a crowd of people, like a mall or an amusement park. What was probably one of the first things you said to them? “Now stay with me!” “Stick close to me.” In essence you were saying ABIDE IN ME.

3. One of the biggest dangers in the Christian life is that we become distracted and wonder away from Jesus.

   *We get distracted by our job.
   *We get distracted by our kid's ball games and school activities.
   *We get distracted by our leisure activities and recreational hobbies.
   *We get distracted by our pursuit to make more money.

   ILLUSTRATION: There was a man in my home Church by the name of
O.D. Scott.  For years O.D. ran his own farm in rural Boone County, Indiana. Then in the 1970’s O.D. opened a new Suzuki Motorcyle Shop in Lebanon, Indiana.

At first O.D. opened for business six days a week, Monday through Saturday. And he would be in Church on Sundays. But as his business grew more successful, O.D. started opening his motorcycle business on Sundays and stopped going to Church. He stopped “abiding in Christ.” Thankfully in time, O.D. came to his senses and realized there was more to life than making money. He sold his motorcycle business, and came back to the LORD.

4. ABIDING IN CHRIST takes discipline. If we are to abide in Christ this year we must discipline ourselves to SPEND TIME WITH THE LORD EACH DAY IN BIBLE STUDY AND PRAYER.

Whether its ten minutes.......20 minutes.......30 minutes or more, that daily time in the word and prayer is vitally important to ABIDING IN CHRIST.

PERSONAL NOTE: One thing I do to discipline myself to spend time alone with the LORD each day is I keep a prayer journal. In my journal I record THE DATE, THE TIME, THE PLACE WHERE I’M HAVING MY QUIET TIME, I RECORD THE SCRIPTURES I READ, AND THE DAILY DEVOTIONALS I READ.

If I don’t see any entries in my prayer journal for a day or two or even more, it is a stern reminder to me that I'm not abiding in CHRIST like I should be, and I need to get back on course!

5. Just how important is it that we “abide in Christ?”
Well it is the difference between being “fruitful” and being “unfruitful.”

v. 5 “I am the vine, you are the branches, he who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

6. Pay close attention to Jesus’ wording in that verse. Notice He does not say, “He who abides in Me, and I in him PRODUCES much fruit.” He says, “He who abides in Me, and I in him BEARS much fruit.”

Christ is NOT interested in the “fruit” we try to produce ourselves through self-effort, and hard work, for our own glory and honor. He is only interested in “the fruit we bear” as a result of our close, abiding relationship in Him. It is the “fruit that is born” out of our relationship with Christ that has eternal value to LORD.”

7. You see, if you and I DON’T ABIDE in Christ it is impossible to bear fruit. If we do ABIDE IN CHRIST it is inevitable that we WILL BEAR FRUIT.

LET US RESOLVE TO REMEMBER OUR ROLE (Christ is the TRUE VINE, and we are THE BRANCHES)

And LET US RESOLVE TO ABIDE IN CHRIST (for it is only when we abide in Christ we can “bear much fruit.”)

Now here’s the third resolution.........
RESOLUTION #3: Let Us Resolve To **SUBMIT** To God's **PRUNING** (vs. 1,2)

v. 1  “I am the True Vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.”

v. 2  “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away and every branch that bears fruit He prunes that it may bear more fruit.”

ILLUSTRATION: Right next door to our house is a 65 acre hybrid striped bass fish farm. The man who owns the fish farm lives in Raleigh and he is a landscaper by trade; so he has planted a wide variety of fruit trees on the first couple of acres of land where you enter the fish farm

He also planted about 150 feet of MUSKADINE and CONCORD GRAPE VINES. Several weeks ago after we had our first frost, DON, one of the men who works on the fish farm, spent an entire day “pruning” all those grape vines. He cut off any branch that didn't look healthy or that had withered and dried up. Just to look at what was left after Don did all that pruning, one might think he's completely killed the grape vines. But I know come next summer, those grape vines will be FULLER and MORE PRODUCTIVE than they were this year.

PRUNING is a vital part of growing healthy plants. PRUNING must be done by someone who knows what he is doing. If he cuts too much it can kill the branch. If he doesn't cut enough, it will defeat his purpose. He must also know THE RIGHT TIME to prune.

1. Just like “grapevines” our lives need to be PRUNED in order for us to be more FRUITFUL. The way GOD prunes us is through TRIALS.

No doubt, you and I will face many, many trials over this next year. As painful as they may be, remind yourself “God is pruning me for my good.”
2. Sometimes we “stop growing” spiritually.......we stagnate......we become less fruitful than we once were. And so GOD will prune us with a difficult trial to get us growing again.

3. Sometimes GOD will prune us to “slow us down.” We become impatient and get ahead of GOD, and He will use a trial to slow us down so we will get back in step with the Spirit.

4. Sometimes GOD will prune us because our spirits become diseased with PRIDE......or......SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS.......or......BITTERNESS......... or .......HATRED.......or UNFORGIVENESS. And God knows if we are to be fruitful again those destructive attitudes have got to be cut out of our heart.

5. And so if you and I are to have A FRUITFUL NEW YEAR in 2014, WE MUST RESOLVE TO SUBMIT TO GOD'S PRUNING.

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A New Leaf

He came to my desk, with a quivering lip
The lesson was done
Have you a new leaf for me, teacher.
I have spoiled this one
I took his leaf, all soiled and blotted
And gave him a new one, all unspotted.
Then into his stirred heart I smiled
“Do better now my child.”

I went to the throne with a trembling heart
The year was done.
Have you a new year for me, Father
I have spoiled this one.
He took my year, all soiled and blotted
And gave me a new one, all unspotted
And into my tired heart He smiled,
“Do better now, my child.”

Source unknown